Universal Religion.

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UNIVERSAL RELIGION AND THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS

"Whatever road I take joins the highway that leads to thee."

Parsee Scriptures.

"I make bold to say that we who are now living will behold the dawn of a new religion which is to be really universal in its principles and as broad as humanity in its boundaries; which is not, however, to be Christianity, nor Judaism, nor Buddhism, nor Neo-Brahmanism, but a new faith into which the specific religions are in form to die that they may continue to live in spiritual substance."—Wm. J. Potter, in 1893.

In the name of universal brotherhood, in the interests of truth and in the spirit of love, we have gone like pilgrims, with the staff of sincerity and the scrip of sympathy to the shrines of sacred scripture that contain the gospel of the great religions.

What has our pilgrimage done for us? Intellectually, it has widened the bounds of our knowledge concerning these systems of faith, it has corrected certain errors and false impressions, thereby banishing prejudices that were the product of those misconceptions. Spiritually, our pilgrimage has broadened us, made us more catholic in our sympathies, more cosmopolitan in our attitude to the non-Christian religions, more responsive to inspirations from sources we supposed were unpromising, if not wholly void of helpfulness. In a word, our pilgrimage has deepened within us that spirit which is more than forbearance, more than tolerance, more than charity and to which we give the name Appreciation; the spirit that prompts us to bow before every teacher, be he Buddha or

Zoroaster, Confucius or Jesus; that leads us to find moral and spiritual food in all sacred scriptures, be they the Pitakas or the New Testament, the Avesta or the Qur'an, valuing each teacher, each book, in proportion to the helpfulness derived therefrom; the spirit that in looking at the various sects of Christianity compares them to the stops and pedals of a great organ, each contributing some tone or timbre toward the complete harmony of human faith. Our pilgrimage has taught us that no one can enter into the respective messages of the world's great religions or into the lives of the great founders and teachers without taking a distinct forward step in spiritual progress, without reducing the number of one's prejudices, without developing the qualities of fair-mindedness, candor, catholicity, appreciation. In so far, then, as our pilgrimage has achieved for us these results we must count it a distinct spiritual gain.

We have discovered that all of the seven extant great religions, despite their differences, face the same way, look up to the same ideal of a diviner life on earth as man's most immediate concern; all ask the same essential, vital questions relating to morals and religion, to-wit: Is there a God? Is man immortal? Is duty binding upon us? What shall I do to be saved? To each of these primary religious questions each of these religions gives an answer of its own. All, again, emphasize some one particular doctrine or belief, constituting the keynote of each.

From actual reading of the Bibles of these religions we have proved that moral precepts relating to justice, gentleness, tolerance, truthfulness, forgiveness, love, which many think are to be found in the Old and New Testaments alone, appear also in the other five Bibles. Nay more, we discovered certain moral maxims in these scriptures which are lacking in the Christian Bible, while every moral sentiment found in it is paralelled by corresponding sentences in one or another of the rest.

The Golden Rule we once thought original with Jesus, but we came across it in the teachings of Confucius and of Gotama, we read the version of it given by Mohammed and by Zoroaster. Even Moses, or the author of the injunction "an eye

for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, we observed, did not teach a doctrine of revenge in those words, but on the contrary, he set forth the doctrine of justice as then understood and justice is the heart of the Golden Rule.

The ten commandments, we found, might be extended to at least fourteen so as to include the inculcating of temperance, humaneness, cleanliness and intellectual honesty, commandments contributed by Buddhism, Mohammedanism and Hinduism.

Again, by appeal to these same Bibles we have discovered that the religious sentiments of reverence, wonder, awe, aspiration are present in the hearts of the billion non-Christian souls no less than in the hearts of the four hundred and fifty millions who take the Christian name. We listened to a Hindu psalm and were at once reminded of a similar psalm in the Old Testament and also of the refrain in the "Litany" of the Episcopal Prayer-Book. We heard the Parsee's prayer for purity and realized how slight a change in the words of that prayer is required to make it suit our own spiritual need. We read the Buddha's "eight-fold noble path" and though we believe neither in reincarnation nor in Nirvana, we know that we too must walk that path if all the possibilities of character-development are to be ours. We opened the "Kings" and the Qur'an and found that each contains the credentials of a religion that on many a spiritual theme speaks to our hearts in accents beautiful and divine.

So deeply impressed were we by the purity of spirit, the nobility of purpose and consecration to an ideal aim that mark the lives of the founders of the great religions that we shrink from comparing them. We feel compelled to refrain from declaring the spirit of any one of them to be superior to that of all the rest, a practice that prevails pretty generally among representatives of these religions. Who, that has made an impartial study of the life and work of these great teachers, will dare to say that the spirit of Zoroaster was any less pure, less fine, less exalted than the spirit of Jesus? Who will dare to say that Confucius was less consecrated than the Buddha or that Mohammed was less sincere than Moses? Who, in the light of even our imperfect studies in comparative religion

will think of affirming that Jesus summed up in his personality all the qualities of the other great religious teachers and added to that sum his own distinguishing attributes? Far be it from us to detract one iota from that which constitutes the spiritual greatness of Jesus, yet there is nothing to warrant so extravagant a claim as this "pleroma" implies. From all such comparisons, contrasts and extravagant, unwarranted claims our pilgrimage has saved us; at the same time it has bidden us be discriminating in our estimates and judgments both of the teachers and of their respective gospels.

Not the least important of the discoveries resulting from our pilgrimage is that which pertains to the unity and diversity of the great religions. We see that all are one because all are rooted in universal human nature and all are simply so many expressions of man's effort to perfect himself in all his relations—and this effort is the essence of religion. On the other hand, these religions are all different because of their various local origins and because of the various special claims made by each but shared by no other. In other words, we have seen that each of these religions has a special and a universal element, the former indicating its difference from the others, the latter its oneness with them. Mohammedanism is a **religion,** because of its universal element, i. e., its root and the idealward effort, beliefs and sentiments which it shares with all other religions. It is the **Mohammedan** religion because of its special element, its claim that Mohammed is **the** prophet of God and the Qur'an God's supreme revelation to man. Christianity is a religion because of the same universal element which it contains; it is the **Christian** religion because of its special claim that Jesus **is the** Christ of God, the sole Savior of mankind. So each of the other five religions has its universal element, its ideas, sentiments, aspirations, which it shares with all others; each has also its special element, represented by those claims and doctrines which are peculiar to itself.

The question therefore arises, very naturally and spontaneously, will any one of these seven religions conquer and absorb the other six and so become itself a universal religion? At the World's Parliament of Religions this expectation was entertained and expressed by one or more representatives of

each of the seven religions. The fervent Buddhist pictured the universal reign of Gotama's faith. The enthusiastic Mohammedan made bold to predict the universal sway of Islam. The devout Christian prayed for the redemption of the world through his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. At Saratoga, in 1894, Unitarianism was declared "identical with Universal Religion;" yet it still remains a sect of Christianity, still retains the Christian name and singles out the religion of Jesus to be accepted by all the churches of the National Conference and makes acceptance of this religion the central plank of its denominational platform, saying not one word of any other religion as being even partially true or of any other great teacher as making any contribution essential to the formation of an all-round human ideal. But would a Baptist, Methodist or Presbyterian change his name to "Unitarian" even were it a synonym for universal religion? Would a Jew ever join a Buddhist church if Buddhism were the name of a universal religion? Would a Mohammedan, even were he to forget Geoffrey of Lorraine, acept the name "Christian" as equivalent to universal? Would a Christian be willing to be styled "Mohammedan" were Islam to attain universality? These queries suggest that there are certain insurmountable obstacles that stand in the way of any one of the seven great religions representing universal religion and these we must now consider.

1. To begin with, they all are built on the principle of authority. Each appeals to its own leader, or book, when any disputed or open question arises for settlement. To whom shall we go for the answer? The Buddhist points to his deified Gotama, saying "go to him, he has the words of eternal truth" The Parsee points with like remark to his inspired Zarathustra, the Moslem to his infallible Mohammed, the Christian to his supranatural Jesus. But it is an insult to a Christian to ask him to accept the authority of Gotama or of Mohammed and it is equally an insult to ask a Buddhist or a Mohammedan to accept the authority of Jesus or of Paul.

Universal Religion insults none because it recognizes all, showing impartial gratitude and reverence to all and paying due homage to each according to the amount of truth he has

taught and the degree to which his character ennobles and inspires.

2. Hindus, Buddhists, Parsees, Christians, and the rest, all pursue truth by the method of authority, i. e. by appeal to "revelation." "This is true," each one says, "because it is in my sacred book, in this revelation from God" and of course there can be no debating the question because it is a revelation. But alas, the alleged revelations do not give one and the same answer to every question. Take, for example, that most pressing practical question "What shall I do to be saved?" The Hindu says, "Study and meditate," the Buddhist, "live an absolutely unselfish life;" the Parsee, "be pure in thought, word and deed;" the Confucian, "reproduce Nature's order;" the Jew, "fulfill the law of righteousness;" the Christian, "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ;" the Mohammedan, "submit to the decrees of the heavenly Sultan, Allah." Here, then, are seven revelations offering seven different answers to our question, each one of them, moreover, imposing its answer as dogma, that is, as not to be questioned because "revealed."

Universal Religion appeals to none of these conflicting revelations, but to evidence, and it insists on debate as absolutely indispensable to the discovery of truth. It holds that the first question to be asked concerning any statement of belief must be, is it true and this can be determined only by appeal to that standard of truth-seeking which accords freedom of thought to each human soul and permits nothing but the agreement of all capable of thinking on the disputed question (the "consensus of the competent") to settle it, and even then it makes allowance for the possible discovery of new facts which may in some measure modify the conclusion reached. To be sure the belief, whatever it may be, is no truer then than it was at first, but nothing short of such a test could warrant regarding it as a universally accepted truth. In other words, the method of universal religion is not dogmatic but scientific. It does not say, "this is true because it is in this sacred book, or because it was uttered by this founder;" it says, this is true because it has been tested, because it has been sifted, subjected to the most careful and crucial scrutiny, because it has successfully passed through the ordeal of that six-fold process

known as the method of science, without which no open question in any department of thought has ever yet been closed.

3. All the great religions make membership depend on acceptance of their Leader, or their Sacred Book, or both. To join a Christian church one must accept the New Testament as the standard of faith and morals, and regard Jesus as Savior, or at least as the complete, all-sufficient guide and exemplar. But this test of fellowship shuts out four hundred and fifty million Buddhists who accept the "Pitakas" and who regard Gotama as their Savior or Leader. It shuts out two hundred million Mohammedans who accept the Qur'an as their standard in religion and who look on Mohammed as the perfect Teacher and Guide. In short, the Christian requirement for membership shuts out two-thirds of the human race. Equally exclusive is the Buddhist test of fellowship and all the others in greater or less degree shut out souls who should be welcome where the common object is to strive for perfection in all the relations of life.

Universal Religion sets aside these excluding tests of fellowship. It seeks to unite men and women not in the bonds of Christian love, or of Buddhist love or of Mohammedan love, but solely in the bonds of human love. Christianity aims to unite men in the bonds of Christian love. It accepts all Christians on equal terms, but all non-Christians on no terms. Universal Religion holds that it is not enough for a group of men and women to be brothers and sisters in Christ, or in Mohammed, or in Moses; they must be brothers and sisters in humanity with all the rest of mankind; that is what true, ideal fellowship calls for. Universal Religion welcomes all free souls who wish to live upward toward truth of thought, truth of feeling and truth of will, as our lamented pioneer, Dr. F. E. Abbot, expressed it. Only they who wish to live downward to the opposite of these supreme ends of life, if indeed there be any souls absolutely given over to irreligion, could Universal Religion exclude. For no man can live upward and downward **at the same time.** In actual life we are neither wholly angelic nor wholly demonic but all of us are either religious or irreligious, that is to say all of us either strive to live upward and make effort toward the ideal our

aim or we make no such effort toward Truth, Duty, Love. Hence, if there is to be a religious fellowship at all it can include only those who wish to be religious, that is, to live upward. Futile and vain it is to think of an all-embodying human fellowship because religion excludes irreligion as government excludes anarchy. We can hope to unite men in one great fellowship only if that fellowship be religious. Universal Religion accepts the irreconcilable antagonism between living upward and living downward, between religion and irreligion and consequently makes its test of fellowship the wish to live upward and not by any means assent to any intellectual propositions, as is done by the special religions and their sects. When the dream of such a fellowship is historically realized it will include all sects, large and small; not, however, as sects, but as free human souls, for then all these sects will have ceased to be sectarian, submitting, in the love of truth, all their sectarian doctrines to the test of the method of freedom, the method of science. If the world continues to advance, sectarianism will become as absurd in religion as it already is in science. Today the universal church fellowship is only an ideal; tomorrow it will be a fact, because history affirms that man is a progressive being. Perfect liberty in perfect love; anything less than that is unworthy to serve as the principle of fellowship for a religion that would be universal.

4. Each of the seven great religions, by reason of the particular circumstances under which it came into the world and the particular type of evils to protest against which it originated, sets forth a more or less partial, one-sided ideal of life. Each uplifts a side of life and makes development of that side the main feature of its teaching rather than development of all the possibilities of our human nature in right relation and in proper proportion,—the physical and the intellectual, the emotional and the practical. As an example take Christianity, the religion with which we are most familiar. It is strongly representative of the feminine or emotional virtues, —meekness, humility, resignation, compassion, self-abnegation love, just as early Judaism is in large measure representative of the masculine virtues,—justice, loyalty, fortitude, patriotism. In his emphasis on self-abnegation Jesus was led to attach small

value to the pursuit of knowledge as a worthy object in life, and to look on the physical and aesthetic life as a hindrance to the development of the spiritual life. True, this very one-sidedness, this exclusive glorification of the gentler virtues was the secret of his success as a restorer of hope and faith to an empire sunk in despair and unbelief. His message proved to be precisely what was then wanted. By uplifting the emotional side at the expense of the physical, intellectual and aesthetic, Jesus manifested a noble narrowness that saved the Roman world. But, on the other hand, this very onesidedness makes it impossible to regard the ideal taught by Jesus as a complete one, while gratefully and reverently recognizing and appreciating his indispensable contributions to the complete ideal. Similarly a study of the ideals set forth by the other great Teachers would lead us to a like conclusion, namely, that each has the defects of its qualities and does not cover every side of life.

Universal Religion, therefore, heir of the historic religions, inherits the contributions of each to the formation of the complete ideal of life, holding that no one religion contains it, for it is and can be nothing less than the harmonious development of all the possibilities of our many-sided human nature in one rounded life. Toward this modern conception of life's ideal each of the seven great religions contributes its special quota, but no one of them in its sacred scriptures presents this ideal.

Universal Religion, therefore, in answer to the question, whom shall we follow, whom shall we accept as our Leader, our representative of the ideal of humanity, will mention not any one, but all—Gotama, Zarathustra, Confucius, Moses, Jesus, Mohammed(adding Socrates, Marcus Aurelius and all other world-teachers. If asked "why mention all and refuse to select one?" the answer is because it takes all of these and more to embody the full-orbed human ideal. There never was in any one soul a concentration of all the perfections possible to all persons, past, present and to be. Only in imagination, not in history, has such a Leader lived, though in China they think him Confucius, in Ceylon, Gotama, the Buddha, in Christendom, Jesus the Christ. As the entire

beauty and excellence of the diamond does not shine from any one of its many facets, but is produced only from them altogether, so it takes all the great religious Leaders and more beside, to produce the beauty and excellence of the ideal of humanity.

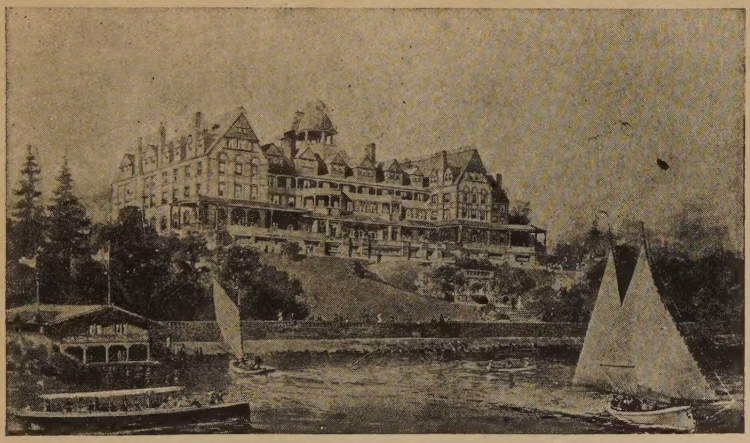
Such are the chief reasons why no one of the seven great religions can ever conquer and absorb the other six and become itself a universal religion. As long as each one of them remains sectarian, setting up an external authority, a dogma, a book, a name, a test, repudiated by all the rest, it is absurd to expect that any one of them will ever be equivalent to Universal Religion. A union of these conflicting systems of faith under the banner of any one of them is utterly impossible. The only possible union is one not of systems but of souls, a religious brotherhood of free souls united on the basis of freedom for the attainment of moral and religious truth by the method of freedom, to the end that life may be richer, grander, diviner.

As fast as men learn to value spiritual freedom more than bondage to tradition or creed, as fast as people grow to care more for truth than for sectarian victory, so fast will they hasten the advent of that religion which will lift them above all differences of creed, color, class and race into that sublime religious fellowship which has been the dream of every age and of every clime.

A NEW SYSTEM OF PHILOSOPHY.

We take exceptional pleasure in calling the attention of our readers to the recent publication in two volumes of the posthumous work of our lamented pioneer in the Cause of free, spiritual and universal religion—Francis Ellingwood Abbot. It is entitled "The Syllogistic Philosophy," and marks the most important scholarly contribution to philosophy since Hegel. The celebrated dictum of Descartes, "I think, therefore I am," has been the accepted axiom from which modern philosophy [illegible] starts But Dr. Abbot goes back of Descar-

tes' dictum, proving it to be a false start inasmuch as it leaves the "I" unaccounted for. A genuine beginning can be made only in a proposition whose ground and content are one. This the author finds in the statement, "Human knowledge exists," involving a "theory of universals" which is the heart of the whole philosophical system. As a close thinker Dr. Abbot had no superior among his contemporaries and as an interpreter of the scientific method, which meets the reader at every step of the logical argument, this latest of the great philosophers had no equal. To have built a system of philosophy upon the solid granite of science, or exact knowledge of the real universe and reared upon it a consistent superstructure, culminating in the verified truths of God and Duty, with a crowning faith in immortality as "ethical necessity" is to have rendered humanity a service of transcendent worth. Messrs. Little, Brown & Co., Boston, are the publishers of these two noble volumes, the price of which has been fixed at five dollars.



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